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SUBJECT: MEDIA WRAP-UP: IRAQ AND U.S. MID-TERM ELECTIONS, VERDICT
IN SADDAM HUSSEIN TRIAL, CHINA'S REACH IN AFRICA. NOVEMBER 9,

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[1](#)2006.

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Debate over the impact of the war in Iraq continued to fuel widespread speculation prior to November 7 about a "lame duck presidency," while most commentary on the results concluded that the vote had "punished" President Bush's Iraq policy. Journalists analyzed the verdict in the Saddam Hussein trial in the context of the U.S. elections and through the prism of Europe's stance on capital punishment. The media examined the perceived decline of French influence in Africa and China's trade increasing partnership with Africa on the occasion of the China-Africa Cooperation Summit held in Beijing. End Summary.

MID-TERM ELECTIONS: IRAQ POLICY "PUNISHED"

[1](#)2. (SBU) Most French commentators predicted that the vote would be a "referendum" on the Administration's Iraq policy, with right-of-center Le Figaro's Philippe Gelie arguing that "while the Democrats were taking advantage of the Republicans' disarray, the fact was they had no miracle solution to offer." Immediately after the first results were available November 7, however, Alain de Chalvron argued on FR2 television that "a new phase of the Bush Presidency had begun," concluding that "President Bush, who until now held all the seats of power, would be challenged by his nemesis, Nancy Pelosi." Left-of-center Le Monde argued that the elections were "an electoral rebuke for President Bush" while left-wing Liberation characterized the results as a "stinging punishment." But for right-of-center La Tribune, "the results were far from a landslide, except where Iraq was concerned." "Americans are ready for change," concluded Daniel Vernet in left-of-center Le Monde as he defined the framework for "a different presidency" with a President "who previously believed himself above the law and who would have to learn to negotiate and compromise."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Right-of-center Le Figaro speculated that Secretary Rumsfeld's resignation opened the way to "a possible turn-about in Iraq," although left-wing Liberation concluded that "nothing had changed for Iraq" and that, "for President Bush, the descent into hell was only just beginning." Catholic La Croix argued it was "healthy to see America's unilateralism being asked to show some modesty" but La Croix also noted that "counterweights such as Europe, NATO and the UN were not always up to doing a better job."

Reacting to President Bush's press conference, regional La Provence paid tribute to the President's versatility, "at times proud, arrogant, humble or resigned" but always apt to "surprise us." The editorial saluted President Bush for "quickly accepting his large personal responsibility for the Republican defeat."

GUILTY VERDICT IN SADDAM HUSSEIN TRIAL

¶4. (SBU) French media devoted widespread coverage to the verdict in the Saddam Hussein trial, although official reaction was muted, with right-of-center Le Figaro reporting that France simply "acknowledged" the verdict while "highlighting its opposition to the death penalty." Left-of-center Le Monde emphasized that "only London sided fully with Washington, while European nations rejected the death sentence." A commentary in left-wing Liberation criticized France's diplomats for their "humanitarian" concern for Saddam Hussein. Popular right-of-center Le Parisien carried an interview with former Socialist Justice Minister Roland Dumas who opined that "although France's stance was the right one, it needed to speak louder."

¶5. (SBU) Right-of-center weekly news magazine L'Express termed the sentence a "Deadly Verdict," echoing the concern in most media commentaries that, as left-wing Liberation claimed, the verdict "could exacerbate a civil war." In right-of-center Le Figaro, senior political reporter Renaud Girard argued that "sentencing Saddam Hussein to death would not save Iraq," an opinion also made in Catholic La Croix which insisted that "sentencing a man to death, whatever his crimes, would never establish unity in Iraq." Popular right-of-center Le Parisien warned that "many Sunnis might identify with Saddam, forgetting he was a dictator." In right-of-center Le Figaro, Pierre Rousselin editorialized on the "limitations of a verdict" and questioned whether the trial might not have "aggravated the differences between communities in Iraq" instead of "serving justice." Rousselin speculated that "the verdict could help the Republicans" and serve to "legitimize, after the fact, a military

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operation based on lies." In right-of-center Les Echos, a report entitled, "Bush Rides Saddam's Death Sentence," claimed that "Washington could not have hoped for better timing."

CHINA'S REACH IN AFRICA

¶6. (SBU) Left-wing Liberation's extensive coverage of the summit for Chinese-African cooperation (Focac) held in Beijing on November 4 led with a quote from World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz from an interview with Les Echos: "China must not make the same errors France and the U.S. made with Africa," by sacrificing good governance for economic gain. The high volume of trade between China and Africa, which makes China Africa's third largest trade partner, led left-wing Liberation to warn: "Why not the first? It is only a question of time." Left-wing Liberation observed that, like the Americans, "the Chinese were stepping into former colonial grounds" and concentrating on "oil- and mineral-producing nations," without concern for "human rights issues." But left-wing Liberation editorialized that, "the West's own mistakes in Africa did not work in favor of its criticism of China, even if Beijing would in time be forced to address issues of 'stability' in the African continent." Both left-wing Liberation and right-of-center Le Figaro concluded on an optimistic note, writing that "the West's accusation that Beijing is closing its eyes to the programmed genocide in Darfur may have reached its target. Hu Jintao appealed to President el-Bechir for 'a fair solution' in Darfur." Right-of-center Le Journal du Dimanche was less upbeat in its commentary, arguing that "China, America's ally, only timidly asked the Sudanese representatives to 'improve the humanitarian situation' in Darfur."

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